



OFFICE OF THE
Auditor General
of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

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February 7, 2008**

BC's Auditor General reports on the provincial efforts on literacy

VICTORIA - In a report released today titled *Literacy: Creating the Conditions for Reading and Writing Success*, Auditor General, John Doyle noted that more needs to be done if the province hopes to reach its literacy goal of becoming *the most literate jurisdiction in North America by 2015*. "While government has demonstrated some leadership in promoting literacy over the last few years, plans have been slow in coming together," he said.

BC's literacy rate compares well with other jurisdictions. Still, 40% of working age British Columbians lack sufficient literacy skills to fully participate in today's workforce. "More could be done to reach out to potential literacy learners to encourage them to take advantage of the services available to them," Doyle noted.

Doyle reported that the actual cost of implementing government's literacy strategy is still unknown, noting the government requires better information on the funding required to improve literacy as well as on the needs of literacy learners. "No one really knows what is already being spent on literacy or how much funding will be needed to reach government's goal," he said. Doyle also reported that government does not have sufficient data to monitor progress. "Improved monitoring and reporting is also needed to better assess progress and to make adjustments as necessary in order to achieve the goal," said Doyle.

Doyle noted the progress government has made in encouraging better coordination and collaboration amongst key stakeholders and recommended the Ministry of Education support the Boards of Education in their recently acquired responsibility to lead the development of literacy plans at the community level. He also urged the Boards of Education to develop their literacy plans consistent with the provincial strategic framework and in consultation with key organizations within their local communities.

The report contains six recommendations for improving literacy in British Columbia.

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2007/08 Report #6 – Literacy: Creating the Conditions for Reading and Writing Success

For further information, please contact:

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Tel: 250 387-6803 or Toll free *Enquiry BC* at 1 800 663-7867 (in Vancouver 604 660-2421)
A copy of the full report is available on our website at: <http://bcauditor.com>



BACKGROUND

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

February 7, 2008

LITERACY: CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR READING AND WRITING SUCCESS

Introduction

British Columbia adult rankings for literacy compare well to other North American jurisdictions, the 2003 International Adult Literacy Skills Survey concludes. Nonetheless, about 17% of working-age British Columbians have extreme difficulty with reading and another 23% have the most limited of skills.

In its 2004 Throne Speech, the provincial government stated that it wanted British Columbia to be “recognized as the most literate location in North America by 2010.” (The proposed timeline was later raised to 2015.) Since then, the province has taken several steps in support of improving literacy, including convening a committee of the Legislative Assembly, developing a strategic framework and amending legislation.

Literacy is at the heart of learning. More literate societies have healthier and more productive individuals, families, communities and workplaces. We carried out this audit because literacy is so important in improving the lives and economic prosperity of British Columbians.

Scope of Our Audit

The purpose of our audit was to determine how well the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education and a selection of school districts and public post-secondary institutions were planning and managing the province’s efforts to reach its literacy goal. Specifically, we assessed whether:

- the efforts of government and key stakeholders to deliver and promote literacy services are coordinated effectively;
- a provincial strategic framework for literacy is in place, one based on sufficient data and information;
- the school districts and post-secondary institutions have developed their own plans, and whether these plans are consistent with the provincial strategic framework (i.e., government’s direction) and respond to stakeholders’ needs; and
- the ministries, school districts and post-secondary institutions are all regularly monitoring and reporting publicly on their progress and performance in delivering literacy services.

The period we were interested in primarily was that beginning in the summer of 2005, when the Ministry of Education was assigned the lead agency role in literacy. We began the audit in the summer of 2006 by visiting with the selected school districts and institutions. We then focused our efforts on the ministries involved in literacy and completed our work in July 2007.

The scope for this audit did not include the results to date of the government's efforts concerning early learning, Aboriginal students, special education students, education standards, trainer's capacity to provide literacy instruction, or support for literacy learners.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Coordination has been challenging, but progress is being made

Recommendation 1: The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education, Boards of Education and the post-secondary institutions should work together to develop ways of encouraging greater use of literacy services, such as through awareness campaigns on literacy and "one-window" approaches to delivering information on literacy at both the provincial and local levels.

Strategic planning for literacy services lacks the support of adequate data and information

Recommendation 2: The Ministry of Education should develop implementation plans that are supported by more comprehensive data and information on the needs of the populations it is targeting and costing information for each of its strategies to improve literacy.

Recommendation 3:

The Ministry of Education should:

- provide appropriate support (such as guidance and resources) to the Boards of Education in the development of their literacy plans and reports; and
- monitor implementation of the revised accountability framework and assess the effectiveness of the framework with respect to the focus on literacy.

The Boards of Education should develop their literacy plans:

- in the context of the provincial strategic framework; and
- in consultation with key organizations within their local communities to determine needs and preferred strategies for addressing those needs.



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BACKGROUND

Monitoring and performance reporting are currently insufficient to enable meaningful tracking and accounting of progress

- **Recommendation 4:** The Ministry of Education should ensure that monitoring and reporting at all levels - provincial, ministry and community - are aligned with evidence-based, qualitative and quantitative performance measures.
- **Recommendation 5:** The Boards of Education should work with the key stakeholders within their communities to: 1) measure progress and adjust strategies as necessary to meet local needs; and 2) report annually on the progress they make within their communities in achieving the literacy objectives identified in the community literacy plans.
- **Recommendation 6:** The government should issue a province-wide annual public report on its progress in achieving its literacy goals and objectives.

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